



Truman National Security Project

Truman Democrats: Strong. Smart. Principled.

Democratic Messaging Tips - Iraq

Republicans have succeeded in presenting the American people a false choice on Iraq: stay the course to victory with the Republicans vs. Democratic weakness, withdrawal and surrender. We cannot resign ourselves to advocating policies that allow the GOP to paint us as weak on security.

Democrats must take back the debate or risk perpetuating the belief that the Party cannot be trusted to keep America safe, reinforcing the rift between Democrats and the military for another generation, and keeping us out of the White House and the Congressional majority.

Polling on withdrawal fluctuates with changing events. However, the public consistently demands success over coming home - even if redeployment is a central part of a winning strategy.

Acknowledge the Stakes

“Ensuring that Iraq does not become a failed state is an absolute necessity. However, we have serious disagreements with the Administration about the path to success.”

Market Your Policy as a “Strategy for Success” Not as a “Plan for Withdrawal”

- Avoid: “Withdrawal”
- Try: “Redeployment” or “In order to succeed, we must reduce our military footprint in Iraq”
- Avoid: “Bring the troops home” or “Get out of Iraq”
- Try: “Plan for victory” or “Complete the mission” or “Get the job done” or “Win in Iraq”

Play to American Optimism and Idealism

- Avoid: “We have failed” or “Iraq is a failure” or “We can not win in Iraq”
- Try: “To win we must change course” or “We have a responsibility to the Iraqi people”

Stay Positive, Avoid Charged Words

- Avoid: “The war was a mistake” or “Immoral, illegal war” or “Iraq is a catastrophe”
- Try: “The war was not worth the costs” or “There was a failure of responsibility”

Avoid Bush Bashing (Instead Attack Administration)

- Avoid: “Bush lied, people died”
- Try: “The Administration failed” or “The FEMA-tization of Iraq”

Honor the Efforts of the Military Community

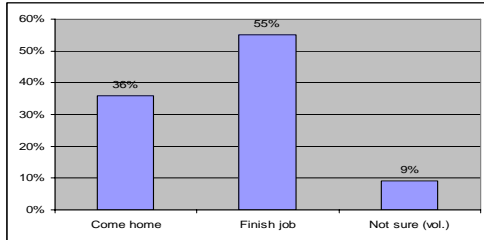
For many in the military failure is not an option and “can’t” is not a word.

- Avoid: “We will lose” or “Civil war is inevitable”
- Try: “Soldiers succeeded, Admin. failed” or “We honor soldiers’ sacrifice and achievements”
- Avoid: “Support the troops by bringing them home”
- Try: “Our troops have done their job well—now, success requires a political solution”

MESSAGING-SPECIFIC POLLING

Framing – A Plan for Success

US troops in Iraq should...

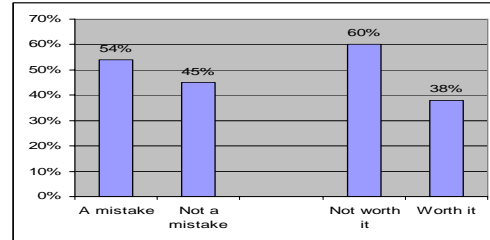


(Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, Nov 8-9)

Tone – Avoid charged/negative words

Did the US make a mistake? (½ asked)

Was it worth going to war? (½ asked)



(CNN/Gallup/USA Today, Nov 11-13)

MESSAGING EXAMPLES

Avoid: *“We want out of Iraq.”*

Try: *“Success requires a political solution and a reduction of our military presence in Iraq.”*

Why: Can easily be read as giving up, cut and run, retreat or surrender. The goal in Iraq must be to succeed, even if redeploying our military is a central part of this strategy.

Avoid: *“We spend billions on this war, but there are domestic needs like health care.”*

Try: *“There must be oversight of our spending in Iraq. Democrats would make sure that our troops have the equipment they need to do their jobs and return home safely.”*

Why: The guns vs. butter debate makes Democrats seem like they don’t take national security seriously – as if it is a distraction. Instead try a guns vs. guns debate.

Avoid: *“This is an illegal and immoral war and a huge mistake.”*

Try: *“Though our soldiers performed bravely, the war was not worth the many costs. At no point has the Administration had a plan for success and that has cost us greatly.”*

Why: Tells troops their sacrifice is for an immoral cause. Calling the war illegal makes it seem like Democrats will give the UN a veto over American national security.

Avoid: *“We support our troops. We want to bring them home and out of harm’s way.”*

Try: *“We support our troops by ensuring they have the equipment they need and a plan for success. The Administration did neither and that was a failure of responsibility.”*

Why: Makes Democrats seem overly averse to the use of force. Our soldiers believe they have a role to play in American security. We support the troops by giving them everything they need to perform their job well – equipment, post-war planning, etc.

Avoid: *“Many of our soldiers went to war because they had no jobs.”*

Try: *“Our soldiers bravely protect us abroad and we must ensure that they are cared for when they return home. While Republicans cut Veterans’ benefits, Democrats would give them the respect they deserve by providing health care, job training and education.”*

Why: Soldiers believe their job is important. They don’t want to be pitied and are offended by the attitude that they are only soldiers because they had no other choice.